ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 81

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
19 November 1980

He talked back to the KGB

By Daniel Southerland
Staff correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor
Washington

You have to wonder which demanded the most courage from this tough Lithuanian patriot.

Living through the 15 years in forced labor camps?

Standing up to his secret police interrogators?

Or making his final escape?

Walking, running, crawling, swimming — it took Vladas Sakalys 20 days to cover the 373 miles to freedom. The most dangerous part was crossing the heavily patrolled Soviet border, with its guards, dogs, electrified fence, barbed wire, and a lake.

In some ways, the men of the KGB, the Soviet State Security Committee, must be happy to be rid of Vladas Sakalys. Resistance is written all over his Nordic features. Don't push me around. Don't try to be nice to me. Either way, there will be no compromise. That is what the piercing blue eyes, the compact body, and the no-nonsense look seem to say.

When he decided to escape from the Soviet Union, Sakalys was with his family. It was in May of this year, and he was enjoying a respite from prisons and forced-labor camps. But when the authorities threatened to throw him — for the fourth time — into such a camp, he decided that it would be too much of a burden, not just for himself but also for his wife and two young children.

He had been interrogated by the KGB about the signing and dissemination of petitions protesting the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, and suspected the secret police were following him. He dodged the policemen, went underground, and a month later left Lithuania on his journey to freedom.

Sakalys was carrying a map from an atlas which didn't even warn him that he would have to cross a lake. All it really told him was that he would have to head north toward the northwestern tip of the Soviet Union and then west. If the guards, and the dogs, and the fence didn't get him, he would reach Finland.

Vladas Sakalys (it is pronounced "Shahkahlees") looks a bit out of place in Washington, D.C. It has been more than four months since he crossed the Soviet border into Finland, leaving behind him his family and a life of interrogations and labor camps. But he looks as though someone had just fished him out of one of those cold northern lakes, dried him off, and given him the first suit they could find.

It is a dark blue suit with white pinstripes which Sakalys is wearing, and the trousers appear to be about a size too small. The collar of his white shirt is crooked. He knows that to talk to people in the West, these are the clothes he must wear. But you can tell from the way he wears them that he is not used to such things and doesn't much care about them. Of overriding importance to him are the comrades he left behind to carry on the struggle against the Soviets. That is what he would like to talk about.

Sakalys is impressed with the affluence which he has seen in the two months which he has spent in the United States. He had expected the standard of living to be high, but the reality surpasses his expectations.

He is to be granted political asylum here and one day may seek citizenship. But he looks like a man searching for Americans who are as tough as he is and not finding them. He does not think that the West has the good sense or the will to resist Soviet aggression. He thinks the Soviets will invade Poland.

"The Soviets will come to Poland," he says matter-of-factly, arguing that no matter how limited the independence which the Polish workers have achieved, the Soviets see that independence as undermining their system.

"In Lithuania, everyone is waiting to see how it will end in Poland," he says.

He predicts that the Polish workers will resist the invasion but that the Soviets will crush them.

And what will the West do?

"The West will not move even a little finger," he says.

To many people in the West, Lithuania is nothing more than a vague memory — one of those small lands which the Russians swallowed after World War II. But to Vladas Sakalys, Lithuania lives. It is a culture, a language, a religion — and a will to resist.

Located on the western side of the Soviet Union with borders on Poland and the Baltic Sea, Lithuania is about the size of Belgium and Holland combined. More than three-quarters of its population of 3.4 million is estimated to be Roman Catholic.

The church says that virtually no religious literature has been openly published since 1945. But Lithuania is rich in underground literature of all sorts.

In 1960, people in the seaport city of Klaipeda built a church with their own hands and at their own expense. But despite the official permission orginally granted for building this church, the local authorities later began to raise objections and impose requirements. They seized the church, tore down the steeple, and converted the church into a concert hall.

Soon the people were fighting to get it back. Over the years a remarkable thing happened. The protesters prepared a petition and in 1979 sent it to Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev. It was signed by an extraordinary number of people — 143,000 of them — a number unheard of for protest petitions submitted to the Soviet leadership.

Given such widespread resistance, men and women like Vladas Sakalys do not consider themselves "dissidents," as they are known in the West. They consider themselves Lithuanian patriots trying to get the Soviet authorities to live up to the rights supposedly guaranteed by the Soviet constitution and legal codes.

Vladas Sakalys does not have an advanced education in the usual sense. After completing primary and secondary school, he spent so much time in jails and labor camps that there was little opportunity for formal training. But through home study and on-the-job training he did learn about the fabrication and repair of eyeglass lenses and became a licensed optician. In addition to speaking Lithuanian, he has learned to speak Russian, Polish, and Latvian, and has a rudimentary knowledge of English and German.

Most important for his work in the human rights field, he has learned the Soviet laws. You might call him a labor camp lawyer.

Sakalys has never known anything but resistance. He was born during the war and Nazi occupation. He grew up witnessing a guerrilla movement against the Soviets. To crush